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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
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INFO RUFHGL/AMCONSUL LENINGRAD 9272
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0582
BT
C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 13130

ROME FOR EMBASSY VATICAN

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: SCUL, SHUM, UR, US

SUBJECT: TASS ACCUSES AMERICAN CHAPLAIN IN MOSCOW OF
- ANTI-SOVIET ACTIVITIES

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT).

2. SUMMARY: ON OCTOBER 11 TASS ENGLISH ACCUSED FORMER CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN TO THE MOSCOW FOREIGN COMMUNITY, EUGENE LA PLANTE, OF CONSPIRING WITH A LOCAL ROMAN CATHOLIC TO NURTURE AN ILLEGAL CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS WHO WERE DIRECTED TO DISSEMINATE ANTI-SOVIET MATERIALS. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERMEDIARY, VLADIMIR NIKIFOROV, WAS ARRESTED IN 1983 BUT CHARGES HAVE NOW BEEN DROPPED SINCE HE HAS ALLEGEDLY REPENTED. END SUMMARY.

3. ON OCTOBER 11 TASS ENGLISH ACCUSED THE FORMER CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN "AT THE U.S. EMBASSY IN MOSCOW" (IN FACT HE IS CHAPLAIN TO THE MOSCOW FOREIGN COMMUNITY) OF "SUPERVISION" OF AN UNREGISTERED CONGREGATION OF SOVIET BELIEVERS AND OF INSTRUCTING THEM "TO STUDY ANTI-SOVIET LITERATURE AND SPREAD IT AMONG MUSCOVITES, TO PREPARE TENDENTIOUS ARTICLES AND SEND THEM ABROAD". LA PLANTE WAS ALSO ACCUSED OF PROVIDING VLADIMIR NIKIFOROV, A LOCAL CATHOLIC CHARGED WITH SERVING AS LA PLANTE'S INTERMEDIARY TO THE CONGREGATION, WITH COPYING MACHINES, TAPE-RECORDERS AND MONEY. HE IS SAID TO HAVE VISITED NIKIFOROV'S APARTMENT AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH, "STRICTLY OBSERVING PROFESSIONAL RULES OF CONSPIRATION".

4. ACCORDING TO TASS, CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS WERE INITIATED AGAINST NIKIFOROV IN MARCH 1983 (LA PLANTE DEPARTED MOSCOW IN SUMMER 1983). INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT HE HAD CONVERTED TO CATHOLICISM "UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SOME WESTERN DIPLOMATS" IN MOSCOW. NIKIFOROV WAS REPORTEDLY REWARDED FOR HIS SUBSEQUENT EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH AN ILLEGAL "CATACOMB CHURCH" BY BEING SECRETLY ORDAINED A VICAR-GENERAL BY THE VATICAN.

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5. THE TASS ARTICLE GOES ON TO STATE THAT CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS HAVE NOW BEEN STOPPED AS NIKIFOROV FULLY ADMITTED HIS GUILT AND PROMISED TO DESIST FROM HIS "UNCONSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITY". HE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT HE PROMISES NOT TO MAR RELATIONS BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND THE STATE IN THE FUTURE.

6. ACCORDING TO KESTON COLLEGE PUBLICATIONS, VLADIMIR NIKIFOROV, A ROMAN CATHOLIC, WAS DETAINED AT THE END OF FEBRUARY 1983 WHILE CARRYING 40 KILOGRAMS OF RELIGIOUS BOOKS IN RUSSIAN AND WESTERN LANGUAGES. NIKIFOROV WAS REPORTEDLY RELEASED AFTER TWO DAYS ONLY TO BE REARRESTED ON MAY 19, 1983. HE WAS CHARGED UNDER ARTICLE 142 OF THE RSFSR CRIMINAL CODE FOR PREPARING CHILDREN FOR CONFIRMATION.

7. EMBASSY IS REFUSING COMMENT IN RESPONSE TO FOREIGN PRESS INQUIRIES, WHICH HAVE BEEN FEW IN NUMBER.
HARTMAN
END OF MESSAGE

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